



Northern East Slopes Sustainable Resource Management and Environmental Monitoring Strategy (NES Strategy)

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Cabinet Approves Phase One of South Saskatchewan River Basin Water Management Plan

Phase One of the first-ever water management plan under the Water Act in Alberta has been approved by Cabinet and is now being implemented. The purpose of the South Saskatchewan River Basin Water Management Plan is to resolve issues concerning water management in the basin such as the availability of water for future allocations, and river flows for the aquatic environment.

Phase One:

- Authorizes a designated "Director" to consider applications for water allocation transfers and to use water conservation holdbacks.
- Provides the Director guidance on matters to be considered when reviewing an application for a water allocation transfer.
- Provides the Director information on water conservation holdbacks, and recommends an interim closure of the Oldman River's southern tributaries to new allocations.
- Commits Alberta Environment to a number of actions, including an additional phase of water management planning for the establishment of water conservation objectives.

The water management planning process is a combined effort of Alberta Environment, the Fish and Wildlife Division of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, and Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development's Irrigation Branch.

For each of the four sub-basins within the South Saskatchewan River Basin, a Basin Advisory Committee has been formed with representatives of sectors with an interest in water management. The sectors typically represented on these committees include: municipal (both urban and rural), environmental/ecosystem protection, industry, non-irrigation agriculture, irrigation, First Nations, and recreation.

The Basin Advisory Committees played an important role in the preparation of this Phase One Plan. Each met a number of times, and all participated in two joint meetings in Calgary. They provided advice to Alberta Environment on water management in their respective sub-basins and on the topic of water allocation transfers, in particular.

In addition, a series of seven public open houses were held during January 2002. The primary topic for discussion was the transfer of water allocations within the South Saskatchewan River Basin.

The South Saskatchewan River Basin Water Management Plan is being prepared in phases. The first phase established a system for water allocation transfers, and recommends that no further applications for allocations in the St. Mary, Belly, and Waterton Rivers be accepted.

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To learn more about water management planning in Southern Alberta, check out the South Saskatchewan River Basin Web site at: www.gov.ab.ca/env/water/regions/ssrb/.

"The designation part of the program is completed, but our work with our new and existing parks and protected areas will continue, including developing management plans to ensure their values are maintained."

Community Development Minister Gene Zwozdesky
July 24, 2001

Community Development staff are also working on management plans for:

- Spray Valley Provincial Park and Peter Lougheed Provincial Park
- Sundance Provincial Park
- Evan Thomas Provincial Recreation Area
- Caribou Mountains Wildland Provincial Park
- Chinchaga Wildland Provincial Park

Visit the Community Development Web site for a listing of lands currently under Community Development administration: www.cd.gov.ab.ca/preserving/parks/lrm/index.asp

South Saskatchewan River Basin Water Management Plan continued

The second phase of the plan is scheduled for completion in early 2004. Its main purpose will be to recommend water conservation objectives, which will determine the quantity and quality of water that should be in rivers in the basin to protect the aquatic environment. The topics for future phases have not yet been determined.

Special Places Update

Management Plans

Cold Lake Provincial Park

From late August through the end of October, Alberta Community Development sought public input on issues to be addressed in a management plan for Cold Lake Provincial Park. A comment sheet was available, the public was invited to view the project display, and park staff met with stakeholders throughout the month of October. Park staff will draft a management plan based on the input received and will seek public feedback on the draft plan.

The 58.56 km² park helps protect one of Alberta's largest and cleanest freshwater lakes with some of the finest sand beaches in the province. It is an important breeding area for many waterfowl, including Alberta's largest colony of western grebe. Spruce and pine forest cover the valley of the Martineau River and provide habitat for ungulates and furbearers.

Big Lake Natural Area

During August and September the public was invited to view project displays on the Big Lake Natural Area and to provide input on the development of a management plan. The cities of Edmonton and St. Albert, along with Parkland and Sturgeon Counties, are partnering with Alberta Community Development in developing a vision for the area, which will guide the Big Lake Natural Area management plan.

The Big Lake Natural Area is 11.19 km². It preserves a lake and wetland complex adjacent to the cities of Edmonton and St. Albert. Supporting a large nesting colony of Franklin's gulls, migrating flocks of Tundra swans, and a diversity of nesting and migrating waterfowl and shorebirds, Big Lake was recently recognized as a globally significant Important Bird Area.

Former Premier Honoured

A ceremony was held October 1 to commemorate the designation of the Don Getty Wildland Provincial Park. This site was one of five final sites designated under the Special Places program, and was named in honour of former premier Don Getty. Don Getty Wildland Provincial Park is 627.75 km² and is adjacent to other protected areas such as Banff National Park, the Ghost River Wilderness Area, and three Wildland Provincial Parks: Bow Valley, Bluerock and Elbow Sheep.

The interconnectedness of the adjacent protected areas and the Don Getty Wildland Provincial Park adds significantly to their overall ability to ensure the long-term survival of wide ranging predators such as grizzly bears, wolves and cougars.

The five airshed organizations in Alberta are:

- the Fort Air Partnership,
- the Parkland Airshed Management Zone Association,
- the Peace Airshed Zone Association,
- the West Central Airshed Society, and
- the Wood Buffalo Environmental Association.

For more information about the Clean Air Strategic Alliance or Alberta's airsheds, check out the Web site at:
www.casahome.org

For more information about the Fort Air Partnership, check out the Web site at
www.fortair.org

or contact Executive Director Mark Psutka by phone at 780-998-0851 or by Email at
exd@fortairmail.org.

Airsheds tackle air quality issues in five regions of Alberta

Since many of Alberta's air quality issues are local, both in their causes and the solutions required, stakeholders in five areas of the province have established airsheds as a means of dealing with air quality issues in their regions. The airsheds are non-profit societies or associations, which use a consensus decision-making process to develop airshed management plans. While airsheds operate independently, the Clean Air Strategic Alliance (CASA) provides the framework within which they function.

Established in March 1994 as a new way to manage air quality issues in Alberta, CASA is a non-profit association composed of diverse stakeholders from government, industry, and non-government organizations such as health and environment groups. CASA and its stakeholders are committed to developing and applying a comprehensive air quality management system for the people of Alberta through a collaborative, consensus-based process. The CASA vision is "the air will be odourless, tasteless, look clear and have no measurable short or long-term adverse effects on people, animals or the environment."

Newest Airshed responds to Fort Saskatchewan's top environmental issue

Consistently over the years, air quality has been the number one environmental issue in the Fort Saskatchewan area. The community was looking for leadership to address this issue so the Fort Air Partnership was formed. It is a voluntary partnership of public, industry, government, Alberta's Industrial Heartland Association, and a non-governmental organization.

All members see the benefit of sitting down at the same table and working through air quality issues together. The group's mandate is to create and implement a dynamic process that provides relevant credible information to stakeholders who will use this information to manage regional air quality, protect environmental health, and influence policy. Their vision is that people living and working in the Fort Saskatchewan area will have air quality that compares favourably to other Alberta communities.

Since being formally recognized by the board of directors for the Clean Air Strategic Alliance in November 2000, the Fort Air Partnership has:

- finalized the design of an air monitoring network, and almost completed the integration of the network with real-time air quality data on-line,
- partnered in gathering baseline health information by completing a community exposure and health effects assessment program in Fort Saskatchewan and area,
- hired its first Executive Director,
- become formally registered as a society,
- distributed its first-ever community report, and
- launched a Web site (www.fortair.org), which makes current and historical air quality data available to residents in the region and other stakeholders.



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Regional Strategies

Northern East Slopes Sustainable Resource and Environmental Management Strategy update

The Regional Steering Group's (RSG's) target for submitting a final report has been shifted to early 2003, and plans for an early fall round of public consultation were set aside to enable the RSG to focus on developing strategies for addressing the priority issues that have been identified. The RSG anticipates holding a public consultation in early January on the Draft Strategy. Meanwhile, the Aboriginal Task Team is developing plans for an Aboriginal forum in November.

Results of the July telephone survey of adults in the region, indicate:

- 92 per cent are interested in issues like resource development, protection of natural areas, and land use in general,
- awareness of IRM has increased to 24 per cent, up from 16 per cent last summer,
- lower overall awareness of the NES Strategy, likely a result of new areas, including Barrhead and Swan Hills, being added to the region since the 2001 survey,
- very strong agreement for a land use and resource management strategy that recognizes there is a physical limit to what the land base can accommodate,
- strong support for a strategy that manages the cumulative effects of all activities and natural disturbances, and that maintains native plants and wildlife, and
- great divergence of opinion about future policies that would allow access to the land for motorized recreation.

Southern Alberta Regional Strategy update

The Southern Alberta Regional Strategy (SARS) has been initiated and includes landscapes from the Great Divide to the Saskatchewan border, and from Red Deer to the U.S. border. The SARS will look at social and economic factors, land and water uses, and environmental impacts to assess the current situation in this area and the consequence of potential environmental changes over the next two generations.

Pat Kinnear (Alberta Environment in Calgary) has been named as Project Coordinator and Jan Simonson (Alberta Environment in Calgary) named as Project Planner. Three consultants have been hired: Forem Technologies, to do ALCES modeling, GBN Canada to do scenario planning, and Russell Consulting to do socio-economic analyses.

What would you like to see in IRM Connections?

Please take a moment to complete the one-page evaluation (on-line at www.gov.ab.ca/env/irm/irm_newsletters.html) so we can continue to meet your information needs. Are there initiatives we should feature, experts or organizations who could be interviewed or asked to contribute content, upcoming events we could promote, or resources we could publicize? Please contact the Editorial Board:

- by e-mail at: irm.newsletter@gov.ab.ca
- or by phone at (780) 427-4857 (toll-free by dialing 310-0000 and then entering the number)

